

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 MEXICO 03979 090103Z

70

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7640

INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PDIP, SOPN, CU, MX

SUBJECT: VISIT OF WOMEN'S GROUP TO CUBA

REF: MEXICO 3049

1. ON MAY 5 THE WOMEN'S GROUP CONSISTING OF 57 WIVES OF GOM OFFICIALS AND 22 WIVES OF AMBASSADORS ACCREDITED TO MEXICO RETURNED FROM THEIR ONE WEEK VISIT TO CUBA. HEADING THE GROUP OF GOM WIVES WERE SOCORRO GAMBOA DE RABASA, WIFE OF THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, AND GLORIA RUIZ DE BRAVO AHUJA, WIFE OF THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. THE GOM WIVES REPORTEDLY WERE HAND PICKED BY MRS. ECHEVERRIA FOR THEIR LEFTIST TENDENCIES AND WERE BY ALL ACCOUNTS UNCRITICAL AND IMPRESSED BY ALL THEY SAW. WHILE SOME OF THE DIPLOMATIC WIVES HERE WERE SCEPTICAL, ON THE WHOLE MOST OF THEM WERE IMPRESSED BY THE CUBAN EFFORT AND BY FIDEL CASTRO PERSONALLY.

2. FIDEL CASTRO MET WITH THE GROUP 3 NIGHTS RUNNING FOR INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS (CASTRO REPORTEDLY SAT ON THE FLOOR) LASTING AS LONG AS 3 HOURS EACH. DURING THESE SESSIONS CASTRO ANSWERED ALL QUESTIONS AND ON OCCASION WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE USG, ITS CUBA POLICIES, AND OF CAPITALISM IN GENERAL. EVEN MAREILLE CARASSE DE CHAVEL, WIFE OF THE  
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PAGE 02 MEXICO 03979 090103Z

BELGIUM AMBASSADOR, WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF

THE CUBAN SYSTEM AND TO HAVE ASKED HARD QUESTIONS, SAID THAT SHE WAS IMPRESSED BY CASTRO'S CHARISMA; "WE HAVE NO COMPARABLE LEADER IN WESTERN EUROPE".

3. THE WOMEN, ESPECIALLY THE LATIN AMERICANS WERE ALL IMPRESSED BY WHAT THEY SAW IN CUBA, ALTHOUGH A FEW DID DECRY THE LACK OF CIVIL LIBERTIES. THE WIFE OF THE PHILIPPINE AMBASSADOR, MARGARET BURKE DE GUERRERO (BRITISH BY BIRTH AND WHO TRAVELED ON BRITISH PASSPORT AS PHILIPPINES HAVE NO RELATIONS WITH CUBA) WAS IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT SHE SAW NO BARE FEET, NO BEGGARS AND NO RAGGED CHILDREN. THE YUGOSLAVIAN AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD TO "PUT THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE FOR HIS WIFE" WHO HE CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN OVERIMPRESSED. THE WIFE OF THE RUMANIAN AMBASSADOR, ELIXANDRINA MIHAIL, WAS MUCH MORE SCEPTICAL AND OBSERVED THAT SHE KNEW HOW THINGS LIKE THIS VISIT CAN BE MANIPULATED. MOST SCEPTICAL OF ALL WAS THE WIFE OF THE SWEDISH AMBASSADOR, ULLA SWARTZ, WHO PROFESSED TO BE AGHAST AT THE GULLIBILITY OF THE WOMEN WHO WENT TO CUBA AND WHO ARGUED THAT COMMUNISM WAS NOT THE ONLY ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT.

4. COMMENT: ALL IN ALL, THIS TRIP LAID ON WITHOUT REGARD TO EFFORT OR COST BY THE CUBANS, WAS A PROPAGANDA SUCCESS FROM CUBAN POINT OF VIEW. WHILE SOME MORE SOPHISTICATED DIPLOMATS WIVES WERE SKEPTICAL, THE BULK OF THEM, NOT TO SPEAK OF THE ALREADY FAVORABLY DISPOSED MEXICAN WOMEN, WERE SNOWED. PRESUMABLY, THIS TRIP WILL CONTRIBUTE TO SETTING THE TONE FOR THE WCIWY (WORLD CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR) MEETING HERE IN JUNE. JOVA

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